

TOPICS OF AN OLD-TIMER

Reminiscences of the Late Charles Durand Continued—Hamilton in 1829
—Some Mention of Official Characters—The Stinsons and Other Prominent Residents of Early Days—The Owners of the Farms on Which Hamilton is Built—Some First Newspaper Men—The Battle of Stoney Creek and the Owner of the Farm on Which it was Fought—The Town of Niagara in 1835, and Some of its Prominent Residents—A Number of Them Moved to St. Catharines and Some to Toronto.

There are many more interesting things about old Hamilton in the late Mr. Charles Durand's book of "Reminiscences" that I love to dwell upon. He says: "My first visit to stay in Hamilton was in 1829. If I mention who was there, how it was situated, its primitiveness, people may now laugh at me. The old log court-house I have described about to be torn down, was there; one built by Peter Hamilton, where the third building now stands, was commenced. I saw the second one as spoken of in the process of being built, and some incidents that happened in it might be mentioned. Many a poor fellow imprisoned for debt, I have got released by process of law when I commenced to practise from it." There was a very special case of imprisonment for debt in the

Hamilton jail that I (Old-Timer) became aware of after Mr. Durand's time, more than fifty years ago. It was that of a woman, I think the mother-in-law of the late Lawrence Devany. She was a business woman

and her indebtedness was for business merchandise. At any rate the circumstances were very peculiar, and the imprisonment lasted for several years, while the plaintiff in the case was compelled to pay for the woman's board weekly to the jailor. Mr. Devany once described the particulars of the case to me, but I now forget them. At any rate there appeared to have been a good deal of malignity in the proceedings. That old law of imprisonment for debt was a very cruel one. It was abolished in most of the states of the American Union long ago, and has, I believe, been abolished in Canada too, except in cases of intentional fraud. It was a Canadian—the late Erastus Wiman—who secured its abolition in the State of New York. A Canadian had been kept in prison there for several years with no hope of his release while the law relating to debtors remained as it was. So he went to the New York Legislature and so impressed the members with the iniquity of that law that they abolished it, thus securing the release of his fellow-countryman, an act that redounded greatly to his credit, and to the interest of humanity.

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"The Jarvis that was sheriff at Hamilton in 1829 was Mr. William Munson Jarvis (one of the numerous Toronto family of that name) who was a brother-in-law of Mr. G. Hamilton of Hamilton. That was before Mr. Allan Macdonell's time in the office. When the Baldwin Administration came into power in the early forties, Mr. Macdonell was turned out of the office for some reason that I do not now remember, and Dr. Thomas, who had been emigrant agent, appointed in his place. I suppose, however, the case was one of offensive partizanship, and Dr. Thomas, being a good Reformer, wanted the place.

“Old and venerable County Judge Thomas Taylor, an English barrister, was the principal legal person. Geo. Rolph of Dundas was Clerk of the Peace; John Law, Clerk of the County Court; George Hamilton, County Treasurer; Mr. Tidd, a six-and-a-half foot tall Irishman, gaoler; Mr. Roiston (living on the mountain), was the Crier of the Court; Matthew Crooks of Ancaster was the standing chair-

man of the Quarter Sessions.”

Old-Timer has a recollection of only two or three of the parties here mentioned. Taylor, Tidd and Rolph were gone before my time of recollection. Tidd was succeeded by another Irishman named Malone; John Law was yet in office and so was Roiston, who was also an Irishman, whose “Oh, yes; oh, yes,” I have often heard, as I was frequently in court to hear the lawyers’ eloquence. Roiston was also Inspector of Weights and Measures in the forties. He was a humorous, good-natured, old North of Ireland man, that I had a youthful fancy for. He was a Protestant, while Malone was a Catholic.

“I found Hamilton in 1829 very primitive. Allan N. McNabb was the only lawyer there. Robert Berrie, my law master, lived in Ancaster. William Notman was living, or about to live, in Dundas; he was a well-known Scotchman there for many years.”

I have a very good recollection of William Notman as a resident of Dundas. He was a very eloquent man and his practice in the forties extended over the western country, and in him “Sir Allan” found “a foe-man worthy of his steel.” He was honored with the appellation of the “Great Orator of the West,” and was elected to Parliament for Halton County. He was one of the shining lights of Reform too, and why he was not favored with a Cabinet position I often wondered.

“The Stinsons were peddlars; had not yet opened stores in Hamilton; can’t recollect any store unless Leonard’s. The Winers, Jacksons, Deweys, Dalys, Bernards, Carpenters, Clarks, Irwins, were there, others about to come. Perhaps Mr. Leonard, the revivalist, may have had a store. George Carey, Mr. Price, (near Wellington street), and a Mr. Huffman, had taverns. The English Church (when open) was held in the second court house. Miles O’Reilly came to Hamilton in 1830-31.”

The Stinsons—Thomas, James and Ebeneezer—were a wealthy and respectable Irish Protestant family, and the richest in landed wealth of any in Hamilton by all odds, and Thomas Stinson built the first brick block in the town. I used to hear it said they acquired their wealth peddling, but I think Ebeneezer was a jeweler. They had lots of thrift and speculated in land all over the west—in Chicago, St. Paul, Omaha and other localities. They made a good deal of their money peddling while the Welland Canal was building. Thomas Stinson, about 1846 or 1847, started a bank in Hamilton, which for a while was prosperous, but came to grief only a few years ago. Thomas Stinson’s son, called after himself, became his successor and went to reside in Chicago, and from which city he managed his great western estates. His residence in Chicago was in one of the South Side parks, where he led a bachelor life, but kept a large stud of racing horses. He had an office on Madison street in Chicago, but was seldom there. Paying taxes on so much unproductive property at last embarrassed him, and he went under. Family discord, too, among the Hamilton members, largely tended to their ruin; but their present status I am not aware of. Like all the Hamilton leading Irish families, the Bregas, the Bulls, the

Magills, Irwins, etc., they were well-looking, clean and clear-skinned people. The Winers and the Jacksons I have already alluded to. They were good citizens and worthy people. Dewey, too, was an American, who kept a "recess," the name for a saloon before "saloon" was invented. "Bernards" I do not remember; Daly, the jolly Irish tavern-keeper, I have already mentioned; so have I the Carpenters, of whom there were two families. The Irwins, too, were Irish and a prosperous family. "Irwin's Block" was one of the first

brick blocks built in Hamilton. It was on the north side of King street, immediately west of John street. I think the first man to occupy the corner store of the block was Mr. John P. Larkin, a dry goods merchant, I think an American, who became a convert to the Catholic faith during Vicar-General Macdonell's incumbency of the Hamilton parish. After his death his store was occupied by Mr. Connor Tracy, from Toronto, as a shoe-shop. Miles O'Reilly became County Judge. There were two of the O'Reillys lawyers, Miles and Hamilton, and then there was Dr. O'Reilly, reputed to be the best physician in Hamilton, who snuffed inordinately, but profuse snuffing was fashionable in those days. Judge O'Reilly's place was in the south-eastern part of the city, on the borders of what was known as "Corktown," because nearly all the residents of the locality were Irish. Judge O'Reilly, in fact all the O'Reillys, were held in high esteem, and some of their successors have held positions of trust. I rather think the O'Reillys came to Canada at the same time as many other well-distinguished families came; the Blakes and Killalas for instance, that first settled down near London.

"Peter H. Hamilton was the principal man of the town; his brother, George Hamilton, the Treasurer. Mrs. George Hamilton (who was a Jarvis) was the first lady of the town, a most excellent and amiable woman. This was about the situation of old Hamilton in 1829. It had no newspaper and scarcely a church." I do not know when old St. Mary's was built, but it was there in 1840, where the Cathedral now stands. I suppose the "Free Press," published by William Smith, was the first newspaper.

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It may not be amiss to mention the owners of the farms in 1831 on which the present city of 60,000 inhabitants is built upon. They were those of Messrs. Hughson, Hesse, Hamilton, Springer, Land, Mills, Ferguson and Kirkandal. All were only in a partially cultivated state. Perhaps the Aikman farm at the east end ought to be included. I think all have streets named after them now. Only a few lots were sold off in the year mentioned. I remember that in the forties Judge O'Reilly and Major Bowen had farms of their own in the East End of the city but I suppose they consisted of portions of farms previously owned by some of those mentioned above.

Mr. Durand's "Reminiscences" have a good deal to say about the Battle of Stoney Creek, fought in 1813. I could add something to Mr. D's information on this matter. Stoney Creek is about seven miles east of Hamilton. It could hardly be called a battle. It was more like a massacre. The Americans were a good deal the more numerous, but it was an unexpected night attack, well carried out. Of course it was bad management on the part of the American officers to allow themselves to be surprised, and a daring piece of strategy on the part of the Canadians. The "battle," so called, was

fought on the farm of a Mr. Lewis. Who occupies that farm now I do not know, but I do know that a son of Mr. Lewis, who is a friend of mine, has been residing in Buffalo for many years. The two doctors Lewis, spe-

cialists, on Franklin street, are grandsons. They have a great reputation in their profession. They are all good and true Catholics.

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The "Reminiscences" continue about Hamilton: "I acted as an attorney in 1835 and wrote a good deal in the papers—the Hamilton Free Press—and some little of the time edited it. William Smith owned it. Mr. Johnson, who died of the cholera, had opposed it on the Tory side." I knew William Smith well in the early forties. He was capable of editing the "Free Press" himself, if he kept sober. He was a printer by trade and both himself and his wife set type. Mrs. Smith was a sister of the late Hon. Samuel Mills. To draw a pen portrait of this man Smith would be an interesting work because he was a "character." He was an American by birth, a great story teller and jester, who dealt rather freely with other people's foibles. He was in the forties the publisher of a little lampoon sheet called the "Lilliputian Argus" and "The Bee." There are men of wealth prominent in Toronto society to-day, who have felt the sting of both those sheets. From the above quotation it would appear that the Irish editor who died of the cholera in 1832, published his "Western Mercury" in Hamilton and not in London, as presumed in a former review.

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Mr. Durand mentions another writer for the "Free Press," a Scotchman named McCrae, who was a rather curious character. I have no knowledge of him at all, but perhaps he means Thomas McQueen, who afterwards edited the "Huron Signal" at Goderich, and in his style imitated Thomas Carlyle. He was well versed in current literature, but never went out in society.

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"The town of Niagara-on-the-Lake in 1835 was a busy place and was nearly as large as Toronto. Among the lawyers there at that time were Charles Richardson, Robert E. Burns, James Boulton (a wonderful, noisy, litigious lawyer), Mr. Hall, Mr. Campbell, afterwards a judge of the County Court." The Mr. Richardson here mentioned I think was a brother of Capt. Richardson, well known in Toronto, and owner of the Queen's Hotel, Front street. Robert E. Burns was a son of Dr. Burns, the great Presbyterian minister of former days. James Boulton was a brother of Mr. William Boulton of "The Grange" in Toronto, and was quite a character. Most of those people came to Toronto afterwards. Niagara lost not only the seat of government, but many years afterwards, the county seat of Welland County, which was removed to St. Catharines, and all the official people and those dependent upon them, removed to the latter place. The Mr. Hall mentioned, I presume, was Mr. John Hall, the custom house officer, that "Old-Timer" knew well in after years. He was an Irish Protestant, and his wife a most exemplary Catholic, who raised a fine family.

WILLIAM HALLEY.